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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

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SUBJECT: FATAH ELECTIONS SUSPENDED IN JERUSALEM

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Fatah Central Committee's (FCC) Mobilization and Discipline (MAD) Committee organized a meeting of 935 Fatah members from East Jerusalem and 26 surrounding villages in Ramallah on March 8 to elect the Jerusalem regional committee and Secretary. After a heated discussion between old guard and grassroots members, a fist fight broke out, and MAD Director Muhammad Madani announced the postponement of the elections. Fatah member Khaled Muhsin told ConGen Pol Specialist that MAD plans to set a new date for elections, possibly by the end of March, provided rival Fatah groups agree. End Summary.

Jerusalem Elections End in Fight

¶2. (C) In an effort by the Fatah Central Committee's (FCC) Mobilization and Discipline (MAD) Committee to complete internal Fatah elections, 935 Fatah members from East Jerusalem and 26 surrounding villages met in Ramallah March 8 to elect the fifteen-person Jerusalem regional committee and Committee Secretary. According to Fatah member Mahdi al-Ashab, FCC member Naser Yousef inaugurated the session, urged members to participate in elections, and assured them of the FCC commitment to the Fatah Sixth Congress. Speaking next, grassroots leader Hamadi al-Rajabi criticized negotiations with Israel, praised the March 6 shooting attack at Mercaz Herav in Jerusalem, and accused FCC members of handpicking the electors in the room. Grassroots leader Said Yaqin accused al-Rajabi of sabotaging the session and called al-Rajabi and his followers "Israeli collaborators." Shortly after, a fist fight broke out between al-Rajabi and Yaqin's supporters. PA police and security services broke up the fight after ten minutes.

Elections Suspended

¶3. (C) MAD Director (and Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) member) Muhammad Madani told ConGen Pol Specialist that he consulted with Ahmad Qureia (Abu Ala'a) after the fight broke out and on March 8 announced the suspension of Jerusalem elections until further notice. Madani said grassroots members gathered at the MAD office and said they will block the elections until various Fatah groups reach agreement on going forward. Madani said the current seven-person Jerusalem Fatah regional committee is considered "resigned."

¶4. (C) Madani told ConGen Pol Specialist that tensions arose among those vying for the position of Jerusalem regional committee secretary, which includes: Yaqin; al-Rajabi; and Abd al-Qader al-Khatib, head of the MAD Prisoners Committee and former security guard for Faisal al-Husseini. According to Madani, Abu Ala'a supports al-Khatib. FRC member Othman

Abu Garbiya and General Intelligence (GI) members support al-Rajabi. He said after elections were suspended, Yaqin offered to step down as a candidate and support al-Khatib "in the battle against al-Rajabi and the increasing influence of General Intelligence forces within Fatah."

15. (C) Comment: The suspension of Jerusalem elections reflects the mounting tension between Fatah's rival groups, particularly between the old guard and the grassroots, who view regional elections as the key to a representative Sixth Congress and who will measure the success of reform by their own participation in the Congress. End Comment.

WALLES